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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000858

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SUBJECT: PRT NINEWA: SINJAR PARTY BOSS AND THE PARADE OF  
CAPTIVE PEOPLES

Classified By: PMIN Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (d).

This is a PRT/Ninewa reporting cable.

¶1. (C) Summary. A crowd of 300 Sinjar residents under the choreography of KDP Branch Chairman Serbast Turwanishi pressed for the integration of Sinjar district into the Kurdistan Region on March 26. Speaker after speaker insisted that if Sinjar reverted to Arab control following the departure of Coalition Forces (CF), the people would either flee to Dahuk or be massacred in their homes, and that it would be the USG's fault. In public remarks and again in private, PRT leader said that Article 140 was not meant to separate Arabs from Kurds and it is not a vehicle by which one side or the other's demands will be completely vindicated. He said this is an attempt to do by democratic means what was done through force under Saddam. He recognized the unique suffering of the Kurds at the hands of the Iraqi state under Saddam, and the persecution of the Yezidi from the time of Abbassids. In private, PRT leader told Serbast that we will hold leaders accountable for their words and their actions. Noting the pro-KDP crowd and acknowledging the election results, PRT Leader stressed, however, that Serbast's actions with regards to his opponents weakened his position. Serbast's well-known bombast notwithstanding, there are some 250,000 people in Sinjar, most of whom suffered under Saddam and at the hands of Al Qaeda through 2007. Behind today's amateur theatrics there is among the people grave apprehension about the future if Sinjar if it not integrated into the KRG. End summary.

¶2. (C) PRT Leader, BCT Commander Volesky and 6-9 Cav Commander Parmeter traveled to Sinjar on March 26. We accepted the invitation from Mayor Dakhel Qasim Hassoun, knowing however that the chairman of the local branch of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), Serbast would dominate the proceedings. Serbast's choreographed "meetings" are well known to PRT, military and Embassy visitors; spokespeople for every conceivable constituency stand up and proclaim their loyalty to the KDP and their conviction that Sinjar must be integrated into the KRG. Today's visit, however, set a new standard for what Embassy regulars have dubbed "the parade of captive peoples." We entered the town to the sight of some 300 people sitting in rows on the street in front of the KDP building. In addition to the Mayor of Sinjar, we were greeted by the sub-district mayors from Qatania, Sununi and Khanasur, plus a member-elect of the Provincial Council. There was an orthodox Christian priest, an Armenian deacon, a host of Imams, and a good turnout of Yezidi clergy.

¶3. (SBU) Serbast and Dakhel opened the proceeding with long speeches about the history of the district, with an emphasis on crimes committed against Kurds by Saddam and AQI. They called on the US to implement Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution and place Sinjar within the Kurdistan Regional Governorate (KRG). Noting that the town of Qataniya had been deliberately placed in Arab-majority Ba'aj district in order to alter the demographics of the region, every speaker added

the Yezidi town to his/her list of demands. In all, the speakers focused on four key demands for the USG, UNAMI and the GOI:

- ¶A. The immediate integration of Sinjar into the KRG;
- ¶B. Return of Qataniya to Sinjar district;
- ¶C. Immediate implementation of Article 140; and
- ¶D. Resolution of outstanding property claims.

¶4. (SBU) PRT Leader was invited to address the crowd, with Q4. (SBU) PRT Leader was invited to address the crowd, with Kurdish television cameras filming the event. He made the following points:

-- It is important that Iraqis and foreigners recognize the crimes committed by the Saddam regime against the Kurds. It is also important to recognize the unique suffering of the Yezidi, including the August 2007 Qataniya bombing;

-- Together with our Iraqi partners, we are building an Iraq where people can live where they wish; they can worship in their traditions; they can educate their young in their home language; they can choose (and remove) their political leadership; and they can pursue their livelihoods freely;

-- Our collective challenge is to undo by democratic means what was done by force. That means dialogue among competing claims, recognizing that everyone believes that his or her position is just;

-- The Iraqis have accepted a UN role in facilitating a process. It will not dictate a solution, but it will provide a framework for the resolution of disputes;

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-- Ninewa had the second highest rate of voter turnout in Iraq and the lowest rate of ballot spoilage. That means that Ninewa's people wanted elections and cared deeply about making their voices heard;

-- The general election produced three parties with seats in the council, and the quota election brought in three single-seat parties. Those parties now need to work together for the good of Ninewa's people;

-- The security of the people of Sinjar is our paramount concern, and we recognize both the role of the Peshmerga in protecting the region as well as the contributions of the Dahuk Governorate in providing public services and rations to the population.

¶5. (SBU) In a new twist on his choreography, Serbast invited the crowd to ask questions of the PRT leader. Most were clearly rehearsed monologues, but all communicated the basic panic born of uncertainty in Sinjar. PRT leader said that the US had not come to Iraq to physically separate Kurds and Arabs; an Article 140 resolution would likely entail Kurds living in an Arab governorate and Arabs living under Kurdish provincial authority. He said that the external borders of Iraq are inviolable but that internal boundaries could change. PRT leader said that those changes would not come about by the will of a single dictator, rather that they would emerge through dialogue, negotiations and compromise.

¶6. (C) Following the 90-minute spectacle, principles moved into Serbast's office for before and after-lunch discussions. Serbast complained that the UN was proving ineffective and that the Arab political class was intent on delaying UNAMI's report until 2010. He claimed that the French Ambassador in Damascus had made this request to the GOI. We responded that it had been the KRG side that insisted that the whole report be put on the table before discussions could get underway, and noted that this gambit had linked the future of Sinjar to broader, more complex issues.

17. (C) Serbast complained that "elements" within the USG were increasingly anti-KRG. Drawing on the talking points used by PMIN in an earlier visit, we said that the Kurdish people had no greater friend than the US. We said that the resolution of the DIBs issue was a process, and that all leaders had to prepare their people for the possibility that there will be compromises; in an atmosphere of panic, responsible political leaders advocate the resolution of disputes through dialogue and prepare their people for something other than absolutist positions. PRT leader noted that Serbast and likely governor-elect Alnujaifi had one thing in common: both maintained that there is no dispute. Alnujaifi refers to the DIBs region as "areas of co-existence" and Serbast refers to them as "Kurdistan." Using Ambassador's Special Advisor's points from previous parades of captive peoples, we said that the suppression of dissent weakened the KDP's position.

18. (C) When Serbast demanded 33 percent of the jobs in Ninewa Governorate, reflecting the NFL's share of the vote, we asked if the NFL had approached Al Hudba about a coalition arrangement. The Mayor of Sinjar said that US Special Forces had invited him to a meeting with the Mayor of Ba'aj an Arab Al Hudba member-elect of the Provincial Council. He noted, however, that the Ba'aj mayor said he did not have Alnujaifi's permission to have substantive discussions. We asked Serbast if the NFL was prepared to make concessions in order to gain a share of power in Ninewa. He replied that it would to gain a share of power in Ninewa. He replied that it was up to Al Hudba to make concessions as the NFL won a third of the vote. We noted that Alnujaifi personally won 14 times as many votes as the leading NFL candidate and had polled almost as many votes as the entire NFL list. Serbast replied that he respected that total, but added that Alnujaifi has links to Al Qaeda and is an unreconstructed Ba'athist who hates Kurds.

19. (C) Comment. Serbast's bombast detracts from the challenges ahead. His antics and complete lack of subtlety notwithstanding, it has always been clear to us that the majority of Sinjaris want membership in the KRG and believe there is no substitute. Most of Sinjar's people are Yezidi forcibly relocated from villages in the mountains and dumped in non-viable artificial communities and left to fend for themselves. The KRG's strongest claim to the region is not old maps but rather the fact that Dahuk is the lifeline for the local population and that the Peshmerga protected the Yezidi when the ISF failed to do so. Oddly enough, we were the only ones to raise either fact; Serbast and his hench people were mesmerized by their own rhetoric, leaving us

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concerned for the welfare of the Sinjaris despite the antics of their leaders. End Comment.

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